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ONTARIO CRIPPLED CHILDREN'S CENTRE

M E M O R A N D U M

D. Martin

Dr. B. Young

TO: M. Izzard

DATE: March 3, 1975

FROM: Mrs. S. McNaughton

SUBJECT: C.P.C.G. Workshop - Chicago

Re: National Workshop on Non-Vocal Communication Techniques and Aids, Chicago, February 27, 28, and March 1, 1975.

- Presented by the Cerebral Palsy Communication Group (C.P.C.G.), University of Wisconsin - Madison.
- Supported by the Bureau for The Education of the Handicapped, Division of Personnel Preparation and Training.

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As a presenter in the above workshop, I was responsible for four lectures, demonstration of S.C.R.P. electronic display, and participation in discussion groups. The programme of the workshop is attached. Included in the three day workshop were lectures, movies, slides, videotapes and practical demonstrations of aids and equipment as well as a very complete workbook (copies of which are in the possession of Marg Young and myself) and the first draft of a State of the Art paper - to be finalized following discussion at each Workshop. Upon completion of all workshops (Boston and Los Angeles) I will procure a final report, the completed State of the Art Paper, and Workbook for O.C.C.C. Medical library.

The workshop was extremely informative and broad in its perspectives. An overview of equipment, approaches and availability problems was presented and discussed, and a framework was provided for programme planning, equipment and approach selection, and directions for future research and development.

As presenter, I had the opportunity of describing our use of Blissymbolics and of receiving feedback from an audience of 60 participants - only three of whom were using Blissymbolics. Many had heard superficially about Blissymbolics but knew little of the results of our programme.

The response was on the whole, positive. The main weaknesses in using symbols versus wordboards were expressed: difficult for teacher to programme for individual child requiring special programme; better to spend time on learning to read; only a few persons would know symbols and therefore rich form of communication possible with symbols would be limited to a small number of persons. These weaknesses have been expressed before; I feel, the difficulty

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for the teacher is the most valid. From early reporting in our Evaluation Study, we are learning that more time and effort are being required of the teachers. The other "weaknesses", as seen by individual participants, were answered by "defending" participants and me.

In discussion with Greg Vanderheiden, Director of C.P.C.G.; it was decided to print, for inclusion in Workbook - "Common Misconceptions re Symbols" and to include a reply. Participants at the Workshop heard the counter arguments, but might find it difficult back in their own setting to remember them clearly.

The strengths of Blissymbolics were grasped and expressed well by participants during synthesis session on the last day. Of those mentioned were:

1. Consistency and breadth of meaning, thus saying more with the space provided,
2. pictorial and therefore easily remembered by child - excellent reference for this point; used by me in lecture --


Bob Scott, "Blissymbols A Universal Language System?",  
Pot Pourri February 1975, page 14.

Whereas verbal communication is based on the human ability to structure a specific range of sounds into meaningful units, visual communication rests upon the human ability to differentiate objects by their outlines and to attach meaning to the spaces so circumscribed. This primary function of storing visual information by configuration is manifest in children's drawings (where outline is more important than interior detail) and also in children's ready understanding of cartoon figures (as opposed to high definition photographs). It is precisely these qualities which characterize Bliss Symbols and allow for their easy assimilation by beginners in the "new" language.

3. related to child's environment and previous experience,
4. fun,
5. easy to learn,
6. creative.

The last point was appreciated most by participants. The divergent cognitive activities facilitated by symbols was seen as a major strength of visual symbol communication.

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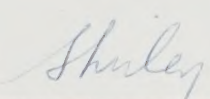


I was able, during the workshop, to be part-time participant and thus was able to learn a great deal more re equipment problems, language development, the reaction of those in the field (U.S.A.) to aids and approaches. I also was able to give time to considering Workshop Organization. I feel I have had experience which will enable me to improve our own workshops - both in content and in organization.

In summary - I think the Workshop provides an excellent overview of Communication and the Physically Handicapped. We should seriously consider organizing a similar presentation in Ontario.

As the O.C.C.C. developmental and evaluation studies progress in the area of communication, I think we will have an ever-growing contribution to make in the field and an expanding need to share results with professionals in the U.S.A.

A very worthwhile, demanding and stimulating three days!

  
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Shirley McNaughton, Director  
Symbol Communication Research Project

SM/blc

cc: R. Gannon  
G. Iles  
Dr. H. Silverman  
B. Royds  
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